

# Estonia Today

## August 31<sup>st</sup> 2004, the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Withdrawal of Russian Troops from Estonia

*The entire withdrawal negotiations were an important period in Estonian foreign policy, which was followed by a new period that concentrated on the new goals of EU and NATO accession. Much has changed in Estonia since the Russian troops, stationed here during the Soviet occupation, withdrew from Estonia on August 31st 1994. Estonia's relations with its international friends have grown stronger. Estonia's economy has become one of the fastest growing and most competitive economies in the world. Estonia has become a member of the European Union, ensuring independence, prosperity and economic growth for years to come. Since the departure of the Russian troops, Estonia has built a strong defence force, has gained NATO membership and has participated in several peacekeeping missions throughout the world.*

### Chronology of the troop withdrawal negotiations

**September 1991** – The beginning of negotiations with the USSR, which followed the recognition of independence of the Baltic States by the USSR on 6 September 1991

**14-15 April 1992** – The beginning of a series of negotiations with Russia

**10 July 1992** – CSCE Helsinki Summit final document calling for the rapid withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baltic States

**September 1992** – Agreements are signed on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuania

**25 November 1992** – United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for the rapid withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baltic States

**31 August 1993** – Complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuania

**23 September 1993** – US Senate passes the Byrd Amendment linking \$2.5 billion USD of aid for Russia to the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic States

**Mid-November 1993** – Second UN resolution calling for the rapid withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baltic States including the creation of a mission to oversee the process

**2 December 1993** – Estonian and Russian delegations sign a protocol requesting Swedish assistance in decommissioning the Paldiski nuclear reactors

**April 1994** – Agreements are signed on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Latvia

**25 June 1994** – The Council of the European Union releases a statement affirming that it expects Russia, in conformity with earlier commitments, to complete its troop withdrawal by 31 August 1994

**July 1994** – US Senate passes amendment, which threatens to halt \$839 million USD foreign aid package to Russia if troops are not withdrawn on time

**26 July 1994** – Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Lennart Meri sign an agreement for the withdrawal of Russian troops by 31 August 1994. The signing of the withdrawal agreement along with an agreement on military pensioners allowed for principal agreement on a 13-month schedule for the decommissioning of the nuclear object in Paldiski

**30 July 1994** – Russia and Estonia sign the Paldiski Nuclear Base agreement

**31 August 1994** – Complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Estonia and Latvia, which coincided with the withdrawal of troops from other Central and Eastern European countries and from Eastern Germany

**20 December 1994** – Estonian parliament passes the July agreements, where Russia and Estonia after difficult negotiations agreed on the withdrawal of Russian troops

**30 September 1995** – Decommissioning of the Paldiski nuclear base is completed

### The political and legal reasons for reaching an agreement

The non-recognition of the Soviet Union's occupation of Estonia by the United States of America, the People's Republic of China, the EU states, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament as well as many others. Non-recognition of the occupation has ensured that the Republic of Estonia is the legal continuation of the Republic of Estonia, which was illegally occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940.

Estonia's assertion, recognised internationally, that it was its legal and moral right to have foreign forces removed from its soil. International support and endorsements from the United States of America, members of the EU (especially Sweden) the CSCE and the UN along with several other members of the international community for the withdrawal.

### Paldiski Agreement

One of the main questions during negotiations was the Paldiski Nuclear base, where a unique agreement was reached. It was agreed that until 30 September 1995, the base territory would belong to Estonia and the nuclear object to Russia.

To help depoliticise the Paldiski negotiations the Swedish government initiated the Paldiski International Expert Advisory Group with experts from Sweden, Germany, the US and other countries.

The environmental damage in the Baltic States from the fifty-year presence of Soviet troops is estimated to run into the tens of billions of dollars. The US government donated 2 million USD dollars for environmental work at Paldiski. The Paldiski site is currently being managed by state company AS Alara.

### Former President of the Republic of Estonia H.E. Lennart Meri at a Conference in Frankfurt on 23 September 1994:

"Unlike Germany, where the 31st of August is regarded as the end of the post-World-War-II period, the Republic of Estonia treats the 31st of August as the end of World War II itself on the territory under the jurisdiction of Estonia. This is a turning point for the improvement of our relations with the Russian Federation, and we have to make the most to expand and deepen this historic opportunity."

